UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
SURPRISE FIELD OFFICE
DECISION RECORD

NORTH EAST WARNER FUELS REDUCTION AND HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT
CA-N070-2010-0014

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to implement site-specific treatments consistent with and to meet the restoration objectives identified by the SSER FEIS to improve ecological sites that are encroached by juniper, restore vegetation conditions that resemble historic mosaic plant communities, and reduce risks of catastrophic wildfire associated with high fuel loading.

Historic fire suppression land management actions have resulted in juniper encroachment which has increased the risk of catastrophic wildfire in the Action Area. The risk of losing key components of the sage-steppe ecosystem within approximately 77 percent of the Action Area is moderate to high. Based on this risk and a review of the EA for the North East Warner Fuels Reduction and Habitat Restoration Project (CA-N070-2010-0014), it is the decision of the BLM to implement the project using a combination of treatments discussed in the proposed action as presented in the EA. The actions will improve vegetation diversity and habitat in the project area. The actions will prevent the substantial risk of vegetation conversion to invasive species and soil loss due to heavy fuels buildup, and will prevent the occurrence of catastrophic wildfire.

DECISION

It is my decision to authorize the North East Warner Fuels Reduction and Habitat Restoration Project as described in the Proposed Action of Environmental Assessment CA-N070-2010-0014 incorporating the mitigation and monitoring measures outlined in the aforementioned EA for three of the four project sites. The actions described for the Bidwell Mountain project site will not be implemented. This decision is contingent on meeting all stipulations and monitoring requirements listed below.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

The Proposed Action would utilize a mix of hand clearing, mechanical thinning, broadcast burning, or pile burning to remove invasive juniper trees on 1,420 acres of sagebrush-steppe and east side pine ecosystems. This project is identified as the North East Warner Fuels Reduction and Habitat Restoration Project Action Area.

The NE Warner Area consists of four project sites on public lands as described below. Treatments within each project location would be conducted to meet the specific objectives defined for each site. Treatments would take place between 2011 and 2021, and would be completed by either BLM employees or contractors.

No new permanent roads would be constructed to complete work associated with the Proposed Action. It is anticipated that a maximum of one mile of temporary roads per year would be

needed to access heavy juniper areas.

Site Specific Treatments

Vaughn Canyon — (289 acres) Located in Modoc County, West of Modoc County Road 1/Surprise Valley Road and south of Fandango Pass Road. The project area is located within the *Fort Bidwell* USGS 7 ½ minute topographic quadrangle within the following legal description, Township 45 North, Range 16 East, within portions of Sections 7 and 18. This project is located in the Upper Lake Allotment.

This site would be treated to reduce fuel levels and vertical fuel continuity between forest lands in the Warner Mountains and private lands in Surprise Valley. Specifically reduce the canopy cover of juniper by at least 75 percent on pine and mountain brush communities on approximately 223 acres (77 percent) of the 289 acre area. Additionally the project would be designed to increase shrub and herbaceous cover in areas where juniper trees would be removed.

The selected treatment methods selected for this site would include:

- Mechanical cutting or chipping on up to 140 acres;
- Hand cutting of junipers with chainsaws over the entire site;
    - Cut trees would remain in place and un-limbed on approximately 70-90 percent of the site; and
    - Cut trees would be fully or partially limbed (limbs above the downed bole removed) on approximately 10-20 percent of the site;
- Individual trees and limbs would be piled and burned over the stump on approximately 10-20 percent of the area;
- Trees would be piled and burned on 10-12 staging/burn pile areas one to two acres in size. Whole trees, limbs or trunks would be carried or dragged from their original location to the burn piles;
- Broadcast burning would be conducted on approximately 140 acres of east side pine timber lands and mountain big sagebrush communities; and
- As identified in EA Table 3.5-1, treatments for all cultural properties recommended eligible or that remain unevaluated to the National Register, would be limited to hand thinning only. For the ineligible site, treatments may include mechanical treatments, but no fire, and the area of the cabin would be avoided.

Livestock grazing would be temporarily restricted within the Upper Lake Allotment for one growing season prior and two growing seasons after broadcast burning to allow for recovery of desirable forage species.

North Fandango — (599 acres) Located in Modoc County, north of County Road 9/Fandango Pass Road west of Upper Lake. The project area is located within the *Fort Bidwell* USGS 7 ½ topographic quadrangle within the following legal description, Township 46 North, Range 16 East, within portions of Sections 30 and 31. This project is located in the Fandango Allotment.

This site would be treated to reduce fuel levels and vertical fuel continuity between forest lands in the Warner Mountains and private lands in Surprise Valley. Specifically reduce the canopy cover of juniper by at least 75 percent on pine and mountain brush communities on approximately 461 acres (77 percent) of the 599 acre area. Additionally the project would be designed to increase shrub and herbaceous cover in areas where juniper trees would be removed.

The selected treatment methods selected for this site would include:

- Hand cutting of junipers with chainsaws over the entire site;
    - Cut trees would remain in place and un-limbed on approximately 60-75 percent of the site, and
    - Cut trees would be fully or partially limbed (limbs above the downed trunk removed) on approximately 10-30 percent of the site;
- Individual trees or small numbers of trees and limbs would be piled and burned over the stump on approximately 10-30 percent of the area;
- Broadcast burning would be conducted on up to 599 acres of east side pine timber lands and mountain big sagebrush communities; and
- As identified in EA Table 3.5-1, treatments for all cultural properties recommended eligible or that remain unevaluated to the National Register, would be limited to hand thinning only. For all ineligible sites, treatments may include mechanical treatments or prescribed burning.

Livestock grazing would be temporarily restricted within the portions of the Fandango Allotment north of County Road 9 or one growing season prior and two growing seasons after broadcast burning to allow for recovery of desirable forage species.

Bidwell Mountain — (193 acres) Located in Modoc County, west of County Road 1/Surprise Valley Road and north of Lake Annie. The project area is located within the *Lake Annie* USGS 7 ½ topographic quadrangle within the following legal description, Township 47 North, Range 16 East, within portions of Sections 14 and 23. This project is located in the West and Lartirigoyen Allotments.

This site was proposed for treatment in the Environmental Assessment. During the summer of 2011 a wildfire burned this project site and therefore the proposed treatment activities are no longer relevant for this site.

Barrel Springs Road — (532 acres) Located south east of County Road 201/Barrel Springs Road and northeast of Big Mud Lake. The project area is located within the *Barrel Springs* USGS 7 ½ topographic quadrangle within the following legal description, Township 46 North, Range 18 East, Section 36, and Township 46 North, Range 18 East, within portions of Sections 9, 14, 15, and 22. This project is located in the Nevada Cowhead Allotment.

Treatments proposed on within the Barrel Springs Road treatment area would reduce the canopy cover of juniper by at least 75 percent on pine as well as Wyoming and low sagebrush communities on approximately 410 acres (77 percent) of the 532 acre area. Additionally the project would be designed to increase shrub and herbaceous cover in areas where juniper trees

would be removed.

The selected treatment methods selected for this site would include:

- Hand cutting of junipers with chainsaws over the entire site;
  - Cut trees would remain in place and un-limbed on approximately 75-95 percent of the site;
- Cut trees would be fully or partially limbed (limbs above the downed trunk removed) on approximately 10-15 percent of the site;
- Individual trees and limbs would be piled and burned over the stump on approximately 10-15 percent of the area; and
- As identified in EA Table 3.5-1, treatments for all cultural properties recommended eligible or that remain unevaluated to the National Register, would be limited to hand thinning only. For all ineligible sites, treatments may include mechanical treatments or prescribed burning.

Livestock grazing would be temporarily restricted in the project area for one growing season prior and two growing seasons after the cutting to facilitate establishment of new seedlings of herbaceous and shrub species. Livestock grazing would be restricted through adjustment in turnout practices, turnout areas and use of other pastures.

Mechanical Treatment

Mechanical treatment would involve the use of mechanized equipment to either cut or chip juniper onsite. The equipment could be either rubber tired or track mounted. Mechanical treatment would only be used in the Vaughn Canyon treatment area on slopes less than 30 percent and where juniper canopy cover is greater than 6 percent.

Mechanical treatments in areas greater than approximately 15 percent juniper canopy cover would require piling and burning of juniper limbs and slash.

Hand Treatment

Hand treatment would be accomplished by crews with chainsaws cutting down juniper trees. Following cutting, there are four options for the limbs and slash associated with the down trees:

1) Trees would be left where they were cut with no limbing. This treatment would be used in areas with low juniper densities (e.g. less than 6 percent canopy cover) and where the cut trees would not be in the foreground visibility zone from roads.
2) Trees would be left where they were cut and the limbs above the bole would be cut and scattered. This treatment would be used in areas with taller brush and where the cut trees would be within the foreground visibility zone from minor roads.
3) Trees would be limbed and limbs would be scattered. This treatment would be used in areas of shorter shrubs (e.g. less than 2 feet tall), tree cover less than 10 percent, and within the foreground visibility area from maintained roads.

4) Trees would be partially limbed and the limbs would be piled at the site of cutting (may be more than one tree in the pile) for burning. This treatment would be used in areas of tree cover greater than 6-10 percent.

Pile Burning

Pile burning is a method of prescribed burning and would occur in all units where slash is generated from hand cutting with chainsaws or mechanized cutting of juniper. Piles would be burned in the late fall through spring period when the ground is saturated and frozen to reduce risks of burning piles causing wildfires. Pile burning would require an approved Prescribed Burning Plan.

Piles from hand cutting would generally be small, up to 20 feet in diameter, and would be in the immediate area of the cutting. The number of piles per acre would vary based upon juniper density but would expected to be in the range of two to 10 piles per acre.

Piles associated with mechanized cutting would be larger, up to 50 feet in diameter, and would involve mechanized equipment dragging trees up to several hundred feet from cutting locations to the piles. The number of piles per acre would vary based upon juniper density, but would expected to be in the range of one to five acres per pile. This treatment would only be used in the Vaughn Canyon treatment area.

Broadcast Burning

Broadcast burning is a prescribed burning technique used to burn vegetation in place. It would be used where young juniper trees would be killed by fire and the vegetation communities expected to return after burning would meet the objectives for the project. Broadcast burning would be used where enough fuel exists to carry a fire, where a fire can be managed safely, and where conditions are good for achieving restoration objectives of removing juniper from the site. Following a fire, it is expected that most of the juniper would be dead but as snags would remain standing for up to several decades. Deferred areas include special wildlife areas that are deferred from fire use for the first twenty years. The location and extent of use would be determined by community protection requirements and management decisions of resource specialists, according to specifications of approved burn plans. Plans would be designed and approved by qualified resource specialists on a project-by-project basis.

This method of treatment would not total more than 900 acres of the project area over the ten year period. No burning is proposed for the Barrel Springs treatment area. Each burn area would be no larger than 200 acres and not be adjacent to each other. These areas of broadcast burning would require the building of hand line no greater than 10 feet wide and would serve as fuel breaks during ignition. The use of natural barriers such as rocky or barren areas would be utilized to reduce the amount of hand line required. The effects of broadcast burning would rely on various factors, including, Fuel Loadings, Fuel Continuity, Slope, Aspect, Wind Velocities, Relative Humidity, Live Fuel Moisture, Dead Fuel Moisture and Seasonality. These aforementioned variables would be studied within the Burn Plan document in detail to ensure prescribed fire and resource objectives are being met. It is planned to mimic naturally occurring fires in the areas of broadcast burn. Areas burned are expected to experience a mixed severity fire and create a mosaic and or patchy pattern.

A Prescribed Burn Plan would need to be developed, reviewed and approved by SFO Fire

Management Officer, SFO Manager, NOR CAL Fire Management Officer and the BLM State Fire Management Officer before any prescribed burns occur as required by BLM Standards.

MITIGATION MEASURES TO BE IMPLEMENTED

Vegetation, Including Threatened and Endangered Plant Species

The mitigation measures identified for wildlife are proposed to also reduce potential effects to vegetation.

Visual Resources

All of the treatment areas within the Action Area are considered Class II VRM areas. The following mitigation measures are identified to reduce potential visual effects related to implementation of the Proposed Action and to ensure Class II VRMs are maintained within the Action Area:

- Dispose of slash through burning, grinding or chipping within foreground views of Surprise Valley and Barrel Springs Road.
- Where slash remains in foreground, locate boles and scatter limbs in areas not highly visible from primary public roads, or screened from roads by existing vegetation (Vaughn Canyon and North Fandango treatment areas.)
- Locate temporary roads along routes that minimize cut and fill slopes.
- Decommission temporary roads following treatment with boulders or other access-restricting methods to prevent public use.
- Reseed areas cleared for temporary roads and staging grounds.
- Flush-cut stumps in immediate foreground adjacent to the road (Barrel Springs Road treatment area).
- Preserve clumps of juniper scattered throughout the treatment area (5 to 10 trees per acre).
- Create openings in stands of trees that are irregular and natural in appearance.

Wildlife

The following mitigation measures are proposed to reduce potential effects to wildlife:

- Pretreat fuels around bitterbrush and mountain mahogany to prevent loss during prescribed burning. This would prevent large patches of important deer fall forages from being burned.
- In order to maintain bird habitat, prescribed burn areas shall be minimized to 123 acres.
- Leave all snags greater than 25 cm (10 inches) standing and create additional snags. This recommendation/mitigation would benefit many species including bats such as long-eared myotis.

- Any active raptor nest found should be reported to the wildlife biologist and project activities ceased in the area (generally ¼ mile buffer) until surveys indicate that project activities would not disturb breeding activities.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES AND REQUIRED MONITORING FOR TREATMENT ACTIVITIES

The North East Warner Fuels Reduction and Habitat Restoration project would require certain precautions during project implementation. Defined Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) would ensure that identified resources within the project boundary would be protected and or preserved. All project activities would be coordinated with the appropriate resource specialist and or the SFO Interdisciplinary Team. Areas identified within the project boundaries as having important cultural, botanical, hydrological, recreation, and wildlife resources that require protection would be excluded from treatment. Historic woodlands within the project areas would be preserved and mature/old growth stands of juniper would be identified and protected.

Where applicable to the Proposed Action, standards for proposed management activities have been identified based on site-specific conditions. In addition, standards specified by the Sage-Steppe Ecosystem Restoration Strategy EIS and the Surprise Field Office Resource Management Plan and EIS have been included as relevant to implementation of the Proposed Action. The following conservation measures are proposed to be implemented by the Proposed Action to avoid and/or minimize effects to resources within the Action Area.

Air Quality

- All prescribed fire projects would be completed pursuant to the standards specified by the Clean Air Act and would comply with all federal, State and local air pollution requirements.

- An approved Prescribed Fire Plan would be in place prior to ignition of any prescribed fire.

- The prescribed fire burn plan would be adhered to throughout the project. Emissions would be managed by timing and atmospheric dispersal.

- Prescribed burning would be concentrated in spring (mid-April through mid-June) and fall (mid-September through mid-November) to avoid coinciding with peak summer levels of air pollutants from other human-caused activities in the area and the winter inversion potential.

- Computer modeling to assess smoke dispersion, and related smoke management techniques would be implemented where practicable.

Fire Management

- The NorCal Fire Management Plan identifies aggressive, full suppression as the strategy for fire suppression in the NE Warner Area under conditions of severe fire intensity, especially within the WUI. However, exceptions may be made where resource objectives could safely be achieved.

- Under conditions of low fire intensity, a less aggressive suppression strategy, such as containment/confinement, would be implemented in previously identified areas likely to benefit from wildland fire use.

- Engines, aircraft, retardant, hand crews, and heavy equipment may be used for initial attack.

- The use of heavy equipment would be avoided in known NRHP-eligible sites, unless approved by the line office.

- Local resources and contractors would be used as much as possible for suppression efforts.

Woodcutting

The areas excluded from woodcutting would be signed to indicate that woodcutting is not allowed. The Surprise Field Office would make maps available to the public indicating areas open and closed to woodcutting within the Action Area.

Hydrology

- Minimize management activities within perennial and intermittent drainages where such activities would compromise normal watershed processes or functions.

- Entry into wet spring areas would be limited to hand treatments with chainsaws and broadcast/pile burning. Any spring fed channel with flowing water or wet areas would have a minimum buffer of 50 feet from the center of the stream channel. During the dry summer months some access to spring areas may be allowed only after on site inspections occur to ensure minimal impacts.

- Crossings over ephemeral stream channels would be identified by the Contracting Officer's Technical Representative (COTR) and be limited to dry, rocky and stable areas. Crossing channels with mechanized equipment would be at locations that are stable and naturally armored with rock. Stream channels would be crossed at right angles and number and width of crossings would be limited to areas that have cobble and naturally occurring rocky areas to protect the channel. A minimal amount of passes over dry stream channels would be allowed and would be monitored by the project COTR.

Soils

- Adverse effects on soil resources would be minimized through management practices and adherence to Standard 1 of the Standards and Guidelines.

- Ensure management activities result in no net loss of soil mass or productivity within the management area.

- Implement vegetation treatments on sites where undesirable invasive species are degrading the soil's ability to maintain proper function.

- Broad-scale vegetation treatment plans will specify appropriate levels of woody residue required for site protection.

- Damage to high shrink-swell soils will be prevented by limiting compacting activities to periods when soils are sufficiently dry to resist damage from the activity.

- BLM will conform to the latest California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and Uniform Building Code standards, County General Plan seismic safety standards, County grading ordinances, and National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) requirements.

In addition, BLM would implement management practices to achieve or maintain significant progress toward achieving the criteria described below to meet Standard 1 of the Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines for Northeastern California and Northwestern Nevada. The criteria to meet the standard are:

- Groundcover (vegetation, litter, and other types of groundcover such as rock fragments) is sufficient to protect sites from accelerated erosion;

- Evidence of wind and water erosion, such as rills and gullies, pedestaling, scour or sheet erosion, and deposition of dunes, is either absent, or if present, does not exceed what is natural for the site; and

- Vegetation is vigorous, diverse in species composition and age class, and reflects the potential natural vegetation or desired plant community for the site.

Water bars on temporary roads and scattered juniper material would be used to reduce sedimentation during high rainfall and or snow melt. Rehabilitating areas of compacted soil would be accomplished by ripping the soil with mechanized equipment to increase infiltration and reduce runoff, and encourage vegetative growth.

Livestock Grazing

- Grazing use authorized by BLM is subject to all provisions of the grazing regulations (43 CFR Parts 4100) and other applicable laws and regulations. Grazing use will be in accordance with the Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines for Northeast California and Northwestern Nevada Final EIS approved by the Secretary of the Interior on July 13, 2000. Grazing use authorization may be modified in accordance with regulation to attain progress towards achieving rangeland health standards (subpart 4180.1 and 4180.2 Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration).

- Treatment units would be rested from livestock grazing for a minimum of one growing season prior to and two growing seasons following broadcast burns through adjustments in the pasture/use area grazing schedule, and herding.

- BLM would seek all opportunities to minimize the impacts on grazing permittees due to livestock removal to facilitate rest. These efforts would include but not be limited to:

    - Design of projects to minimize rest on non-treated acres; and

- Use of identified turnout areas, modified salting practices and herding to provide growing season rest in broadcast burn sites.

Riparian Areas

Treatments within perennial or intermittent creeks and springs would be limited to hand treatments within the 100 foot buffer zone. Crews would use chainsaws to fall Western juniper trees, which would then be piled for burning at a later date.

Vegetation

- Vegetation manipulation would be prioritized to sagebrush-steppe or east side pine communities with juniper encroachment, and where post treatment shrub and herbaceous communities would allow achievement of resource objectives.

- Vegetation manipulation will seek to restore natural ecosystems, establish wildfire fuel breaks, and increase forage production for livestock and wild horses.

- Mechanical juniper shearing and chipping operations will comply with conservation measures.

- Native juniper woodlands would be maintained within the landscape positions where they historically occurred.

Treatment Monitoring and Adjustment
A monitoring and adjustment approach would be implemented within constraints of rules and regulations, Forest Plan/Resource Management Plan, NEPA and the Sage Steppe Ecosystem Restoration Strategy. The approach would include systematic monitoring of site-specific treatments with assessments of the results being achieved to effectively make real time adjustments and corrections, within the scope of the ongoing project, if appropriate.

The project components that would be monitored would vary depending upon the type of restoration activity and site-specific conditions. The monitored components would be evaluated on a frequency that would allow for adjustments in the implementation of specific restoration activities. The monitoring and adjustment program would be focused on achieving the desired landscape conditions, based on site-specific characteristics for each treatment area.

Old Growth Juniper
Individual old growth trees in restoration areas would be identified using morphological characteristics to identify those trees that are greater than 130 years old and preserve them for their many social and ecological values. These characteristics would include:

- Rounded or unsymmetrical tops that may be sparse and contain dead limbs.

- Deeply furrowed, fibrous bark on the trunk that is reddish in color.

- Branches near the base of the tree that may be very large and covered with fruitcose lichens.

- Limited terminal leader growth on branches in the upper 25 percent of the canopy.

Special-Status Plants

- Manage all special-status species habitats or occurrences (populations) so that BLM actions do not contribute to the need to list these species as federally threatened or endangered.

- Site specific management of all special-status species habitats and occurrences (populations) would be in accordance with conservation plans, recovery plans, habitat management plans, conservation recommendations, and best management practices, as appropriate for the species.

- Allow for no more than 20 percent (by plant species) elimination of occupied habitat and no greater than 20 percent total decrease in any plant species occurrence, except as directed in biological assessments, biological evaluations, habitat management plans, and conservation strategies/species management guides for specific species.

- Reduce or eliminate impacts to special-status species and their habitat when conducting ground disturbing activities.

Special-Status Plant species within the project area would be identified flagged and would not be disturbed with any treatment activities. Buffer zone sizes around sensitive plant sites would be identified at the discretion of the botanist. BLM requirements for special-status plant management are found in BLM Manual Handbook 6840-1, *Special Status Plant Management*, 1996.

Wildlife

- Retain vegetation buffers for wildlife cover at water sources, wetlands, and riparian sites.

- Limited Operation Periods (LOPs) and buffer zones would be implemented as necessary to reduce disturbances to wildlife.

- Close and rehabilitate cherry stem and temporary project roads where feasible to reduce disturbances to wildlife.

- Implement habitat treatments so that they do not conflict with the life history of resident species.

Actions requiring vegetation/habitat disturbance such as construction of temporary roads and landings, and skidding or other movement of trees and related materials, should be accomplished in a manner resulting in as minimal disturbance as possible.

Ungulates

- Implement seasonal protection measures and buffer zones as appropriate for permitted activities.

- Reduce invasive juniper where it threatens meadow systems and quaking aspen stands.

Sagebrush-Obligate and Associated Species

- Locally developed conservation strategies or plans developed for sage-grouse, pygmy

rabbit, burrowing owl and other special-status species would be used to identify high-priority treatment and fire suppression areas.

- Implement juniper reduction to enhance sagebrush ecosystems; focus on providing diverse composition and age classes of shrubs and healthy understory vegetation.

- Restore natural; disturbance processes through forest and woodland thinning and prescribed fire burn projects.

- To the extent possible, utilize local native plants and seeds in seeding, restoration and rehabilitation projects, in accordance with BLM California's Native Seed Policy.

Other Native Wildlife Species

- Protect known raptor nesting trees from removal during project activities.

- Manage migratory birds in accordance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Migratory Bird Executive order 13186, *Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds*.

Federal State and BLM Listed Terrestrial and Aquatic Species

- Follow management guidelines within applicable biological opinions and conservation strategies.

- Implement seasonal protection measures and buffer zones as appropriate for permitted activities.

Currently there are no known federally threatened or endangered species known within or adjacent to the project area. If, during the implementation of the Proposed Action, threatened, endangered, BLM Sensitive species, or other species of interest are found, then areas of important or necessary habitat in the project area would be identified, flagged and protected from project activities in coordination with the SFO wildlife biologist. Project activities may be subject to seasonal restriction dates and buffer zones to protect specific wildlife species and their habitats. Project activities would be implemented consistent with the local Conservation Strategy for Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) and the Sagebrush Ecosystems within the Vya and Massacre Population Management Units.

Noxious Weed Species

- All vegetation manipulation areas will be managed following treatment to ensure that noxious and invasive weeds do not become established.

- All hay, straw, or mulch used on BLM-administered lands must be certified as free from noxious weed seed.

Activities associated with the Proposed Action that are prone to noxious weeds, such as temporary roads, landings and skid trails would be monitored post treatment for new occurrences for three years. Newly discovered populations of noxious weed species would be mapped and treated using management techniques outlined in SFO Integrated Weed Management EA. To minimize the potential spread of noxious weed species the equipment associated with the Proposed Action would be pressure washed prior to engaging in project

activities and before transport to new work areas.

Equipment operators and project inspectors would be provided with a noxious weed identification guide for species that are known to occur in northeast California. If a noxious weed site is discovered, project activities should cease and the Noxious Weed Coordinator notified of the occurrence. Project activities should not resume in the area until treatments and prevention procedures are in place.

Recreation

To the extent possible, roads that provide access to developed recreation sites for safety concerns would be used minimally. If necessary to use them for treatment activities, these roads would be avoided during weekends.

Areas where undeveloped hunting campsites occur would be excluded from mechanized treatment. Buffer zones would be established around these areas to maintain aesthetic values and would be coordinated with SFO recreation manager. Hand treatment in these areas would include use of chainsaws to thin juniper densities and hand pile construction. Slash piles would be burned during winter months.

DECISION RATIONALE

As a result of the analysis in the North East Warner Fuels Reduction and Habitat Restoration EA, and the above Finding of No Significant Impact, the BLM has determined that the decision to implement a combination of treatments described by the Proposed Action will not result in unnecessary or undue degradation to public lands or cause significant impacts to public health and safety.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would reduce juniper canopy cover within the Action Area by 75 percent on pine and mountain brush communities, resulting in decreased fuel loads, and ultimately reducing the scale and frequency of wildfires. Fire severity and intensity would also be reduced. Implementation of prescribed fire as habitat restoration and fuels reduction proposed within the Action Area would restore approximately 739 acres with the use of fire, resulting in the return of historical fire regimes and the associated reduction of fire hazard from large, intense wildfires. The Proposed Action would facilitate the restoration of fire as a natural ecological process, potentially resulting in the restoration of more diverse vegetative communities within the area and complementing prescribed fire and fuel reduction actions implemented within adjoining forests, refuges, and BLM field offices encompassing a vast area in northeast California and northwest Nevada.

As treatments under the Proposed Action are implemented, approximately 1,050 acres of the 1,420 acre Action Area would be moved toward Condition Class 1 through the implementation of proposed treatments for individual treatment areas. A total of 77 percent of the Focus Area would be reduced in Condition Class. As implementation progresses, the historical fire regimes would become more established. Although the risk of large wildfires would still exist, over time the expected fire intensity would be less than that under current conditions, resulting in less severe ecological damage from wildland fire.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

There are no known federally-listed species in the project area. The area in the vicinity of the

proposed action is inhabited by a variety of terrestrial and aquatic species including BLM sensitive species and several important game species. Major habitat types within the Action Area include: big sagebrush, low sagebrush, juniper woodland, timber, bitterbrush, and wetland meadows, with important habitat inclusions including curleaf mountain mahogany, intermittent and ephemeral drainages, and riverine seasonal wetlands. No known federally-listed or BLM sensitive species were identified within the Action Area during 2011 field surveys.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public participation was encouraged throughout the development of the North East Warner Fuels Reduction and Habitat Restoration Project Environmental Assessment. Collaboration included representatives from Tribes, local representatives from Federal and State agencies, local governments, landowners, other interested persons, community-based groups, and other nongovernmental organizations.

A scoping letter was sent out to 766 interested parties and posted on the following Surprise Field Office website homepage: (http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/surprise.html). The BLM received four letters in response to public scoping from: California Wilderness Coalition, Cedarville Rancheria Tribal office, Center for Biological Diversity, and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Lahontan Region.

Issues raised during the scoping have been addressed within the North East Warner Fuels Reduction and Habitat Restoration Project Environmental Assessment.

PLAN CONSISTENCY

Based on information in the EA, the project record, and recommendations from BLM specialists, I conclude that this decision is consistent with the Sage Steppe Ecosystem Restoration Strategy Record of Decision (ROD) and Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Surprise Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/ROD/FEIS), April 2008. This decision is also consistent with the Endangered Species Act; the Native American Religious Freedom Act; other cultural resource management laws and regulations; Executive Order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice; and Executive Order 13212 regarding potential adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply and/or distribution.

ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

DOI BLM Full Force and Effect Regulations:

The DOI BLM added regulations so wildland fire management decisions can be effective immediately in accordance with 43 CFR 4190 when:

- Vegetation, soil, or other resources on public lands are at substantial risk of wildland fire because of drought, fuel buildup, or for other reasons, or
- Public lands are at immediate risk of erosion or other damage because of wildland fire.

The regulations also expedite administrative review of those decisions. This rule supplements existing full force and effect regulations for forest management (43 CFR 5003).

Decisions in this document are effective immediately. All documents supporting this decision are available for review by the public. The wildfire management decision in this document is subject to appeal in accordance with procedures set forth in 43 CFR, Part 4.

Appeal procedures for the Wildfire Management Decision are outlined in 43 CFR, Part 4.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4.410, any party to a case who is adversely affected by the decision of an officer of the Bureau of Land Management shall have a right to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (Board). In accordance with 43 CFR 4.411, a person who wishes to appeal the decision must file a notice that he wishes to appeal in the office of the authorized officer who made the decision. In accordance with 43 CFR 4.413, a copy of the notice to appeal must be sent to the Office of the Solicitor in the manner prescribed in 43 CFR 4.401(c) not later than 15 days after filing the document. The offices to file notice of appeal:

	and a copy to:
Bureau of Land Management	Office of the Regional Solicitor
Surprise Field Office	U.S. Department of Interior
602 Cressler Street	2800 Cottage Way, Room E-2753
Cedarville, CA 96104	Sacramento, CA 95825-1890

A person served with the decision being appealed must transmit the notice of appeal in time for it to be filed in the office where it is required to be filed within 30 days after the date of service.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4.411 (b), the notice of appeal may include a statement of reasons for the appeal, a statement of standing if required by 43 CFR 4.412 (b), and any arguments the appellant wishes to make. In accordance with 43 CFR 4.412 (a), if the notice of appeal did not include a statement of reasons for the appeal or the appellant wishes to file additional statements of reasons, the appellant shall file such statements with the Board within 30 days after the appeal was filed. The address to file such statements to the Board is:

Board of Land Appeals
Office of Hearings and Appeals
801 North Quincy Street
Arlington, VA 22203

If statement of reasons for appealing were filed with the "Notice of Appeal", no additional statement is necessary.

Pursuant to 43 CFR 4.21 (b), an appellant also may petition for a stay of the final decision pending appeal by filing a petition for stay along with the appeal within 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final or 30 days after receipt of the final decision.

The effective date of this decision (and the date initiating the appeal period) will be the date this notice of decision is posted on BLM's internet website (http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/surprise.html).

Allen Bollschweiler

Digitally signed by Allen Bollschweiler
DN: cn=Allen Bollschweiler, o=BLM, ou=Surprise Field Office, email=abollsch@blm.gov, c=US
Date: 2011.12.08 08:45:24 -08'00'

12/8/11_____

Allen Bollschweiler
Field Manager, Surprise Field Office

Date